**COVID-19**

Ever since I was a little kid, I looked forward to being a part of the graduating class of 2020. I looked forward to walking across the stage at the Bojangles Colosseum alongside my friends. I looked forward to seeing my family in the stands cheering and waving as I received my high school diploma. But then, the coronavirus pandemic stripped away the end of my high school career and subsequently my freshman year of college.

Friday, March 13th, 2020, was my last day as a senior in high school. I remember feeling scared and upset, but I thought we would go back to school in two weeks. Little did I know March 13th was the last time I would be seeing my teachers or friends. All of the seniors' classes got canceled. My last prom got canceled. The senior field day got canceled. Senior spring break got canceled. Graduation got canceled. The class of 2020 missed one of the most important times of our lives, and we can never get it back. After over a month of quarantine, a small friend group and I decided that we needed to take matters into our own hands. We already had our prom dresses, so we hosted our own backyard prom. We also had a small graduation party to celebrate all of our accomplishments over the past four years. We even went to the beach and had a mini senior spring break. Although nothing was the same, we made the best out of the circumstances we were in. We made unforgettable celebratory memories that I could not be more thankful to have. Additionally, my high school tried its hardest to accommodate what the pandemic had taken away from us. Instead of having formal graduation, we had a drive-through and online graduation. We decorated our cars, and my family was able to see me walk across our school parking lot as I got my diploma and shook hands with my principal. Although the end of high school was not what I expected it to be, we made lasting, heartfelt memories.

During the summer of quarantine, I couldn’t have been more excited to finally leave for college. I was laid off from my job at a restaurant because of Covid-19, so I was spending almost all of my time at home. My mom eventually had to start working from home, and my little brother was doing school from home as well. Everyone trapped in the house together all day, and every day was getting stressful. Even though I had ample time to spend with myself and my family, I was ready to see my friends and make new friends! On my first day of college classes, no one was allowed to sit within six feet of each other, we had to sanitize our spaces, and masks were required. I was already nervous and wondering how I would meet new people in college, but the pandemic made that much harder. After two weeks of school, ECU sent out an announcement stating that everyone had to move out of the dorms and that classes would now be fully online. I was devastated when I heard the news. My senior year had been taken away from me and now my freshmen year as well. Instead of moving home, my best friend and I frantically searched for apartments until we found the last one available in our complex. With classes online and almost all of the freshmen class moved out, making friends was difficult. I spent the first semester at home doing my classes online and learning how to become an adult now that I had my own apartment. The college experience was not at all what I expected it to be because of Covid-19. I expected to meet my professors, form relationships, and possibly join Greek life and other clubs. Instead, I don’t know what college is actually supposed to be like. Your freshmen year of college only happens once, and now I cannot get it back. However, since I have gotten my Covid-19 vaccine, college has gotten easier. I have been spending more time with my friends and meeting new people. Overall, Covid-19 has taught me to be thankful for what I have because it can all be taken away within a second. I’ve learned to make the most of what I have, despite the difficult circumstances.